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O F T H E
N A T U R E,
C U L T U R E,
A N D
U S E S
O F T H E
B I R D - G R A S S .

By B. R O C Q U E .

L O N D O N :

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A. N.

A C C O U N T

OF THE

N A T U R E

C U L T U R E

A N D

U S E S

OF THE

B I R D - G R A S S



L O N D O N

Printed by Henry Lister and Son, near
Christ Church, Oxford.

TO THE
ROYAL SOCIETY
OF LONDON,
FOR THE
Encouragement of ARTS, MANU-
FACTURES and COMMERCE.

GENTLEMEN,

AS the favour and protection, I have met with in this country, inclines me to exert myself on all occasions in its service: so the particular countenance and generous treatment I have received from your society, renders me eager to seize every opportunity of presenting my tribute of gratitude to you. Both these motives have had a share in exciting me to make this application. But there is another reason for my addressing myself to you in particular, on this occasion: which is, that it concerns a matter, wherein I consider myself as acting in a trust: and a part of the office of that trust was, to bring the subject before you in due time. But to render this intelligible, give me leave to lay the following circumstances before you. The late Mr. PETER WYCH, then chairman of your committee of agriculture, among many other public-spirited endeavours for the improvement of that art, procured from America, the seeds of several various kinds of grasses. In the number of those, was one called BIRD-GRASS, (*a*) of which he entertained the

(*a*) This species of American grass certainly merits the regard of the public here, from that peculiar quality which is apparent in it: viz. its exceeding strong power of vegetation, that renders it capable of supporting itself with vigour on dry land; maintaining its verdure even after ripening its seed; and spreading its roots so fast, as to fill up, in a very short time, every void space of ground near it. If additionally to this important property, the copious production, both of seed and hay, should prove to be, as Mr. ROCQUE imagines, this grass may be esteemed a very valuable acquisition to husbandry.

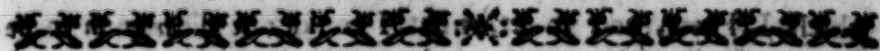
highest hopes, that it might prove very advantageous to this country. He put an ounce and a half of this seed into my hands, in March 1764, with intent that I might cultivate it: and that we might inform ourselves of its nature and qualities, in order to bring it properly before you; that, under your sanction, it might be made known, and rendered useful to the public, if it appeared capable of being so. This was his design: but his death prevented its being carried into execution by himself. I have, notwithstanding, proceeded with the greatest attention to perform the part which was committed to my care: and having raised, propagated, and duly observed this grass, am clearly of opinion, it has several qualities, that will render it serviceable to this country. I have drawn up an account of these my observations: which I here submit to your consideration: being confident, your judicious examination will bring to light the true use of this grass, and your high reputation procure the attention of the public to it, if found deserving, in a much more effectual manner, than my humble endeavours, as a private person, possibly can do. If, nevertheless, it should appear to you, gentlemen, that any thing I can do further, will assist, in effectuating this purpose; I shall be proud to receive your commands: being on this, and all other instances, ready to prove myself,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient, and most

obliged humble servant,

B. RACQUE.



A N

ACCOUNT of the NATURE, &c.

IN the month of March, 1764, I received from the late PETER WYCH, Esq; the chairman of the committee of agriculture in the Society for the encouragement of arts, &c. an ounce and a half of the seed of a kind of grass called BIRD-GRASS. He obtained it from Virginia, where it grows, though it is not a native plant. The intention of putting it into my hands was, in order that I should cultivate it, and be thence able to form a judgment whether it might have any peculiar properties not found in our grasses, that would render it an advantageous article of culture here. He had, himself, conceived a very high opinion of it, by the information he had gained concerning it, from the country whence it came; and intended, as soon as he should have due proof from experiment, of what he hoped, to bring it before the Society for the encouragement of arts, &c. who had, with public-spirited zeal, entered very minutely into the consideration of the means of improving pasturage. Being very solicitous to acquit myself of the trust, I carefully preserved this little treasure till the month of April: which I thought might be a fit time to sow it. Not being acquainted with the particular nature of this grass, I prepared the ground for it, in the same manner, as I should have done for a flower-bed: raking it with a wooden rake. I did this, as I was willing, by every means, to secure its coming up: but such care would not have appeared in the least necessary, had I known its great hardiness, and force of vegetating power, as I have done since.

At the time I expected the BIRD-GRASS to rise from my seed, I found the weeds and common grass coming up very thick: so that I could not distinguish the desired kind from these intruders; particularly the poa-grass. Being a stranger, as I before said, to the appearance of the BIRD-GRASS, I thought it the best way to weed out the other grass and herbs,
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which I knew, and to let, what I could not distinguish to be so, remain in the ground : and my eagerness was so great, to perceive, whether the BIRD-GRASS was come up, that I went almost every hour to look after it. I discovered it at last, in about a month from the time of its being sown, by its having a deeper green hue than is commonly seen in our grasses : and I transplanted it, as soon as I imagined it would bear moving, into some of the same kind of ground, as that on which it had been raised : having first turned it up and cleared it from weeds. The size of this piece of ground, was about twenty rods : part of it a little gravelly, and the other part of it moory land. I soon observed, the BIRD-GRASS grew better on the gravelly than on the moory part of the ground. That, on the gravelly, being of a better colour and sweeter than that on the moory ; which was pale and yellow. And with respect to the moory ground itself, one part was moister than the other, and the BIRD-GRASS grew better on the drier side, than on the wet. The grass looked well, however, all the summer, and, in the month of September following, I began to gather the seed, and proceeded in it till October. The product of seed was in quantity about twelve pounds.

The first year, the grass did not grow to be above two feet and an half high : but the second, it rose to be four feet high. On the 14th of June of that year, being 1765, I measured out ten rods of this grass ; and cut it. Three days after, I weighed the product of this ten rod, herb and seed together ; and they amounted to twelve hundred pounds. The 10th of August following, the same grass was again grown to the height of two feet eight inches, and was a second time fit to cut for hay : but I did not cut it ; because, I wanted a second crop of seed : which I obtained in the beginning of October ; and it proved a much greater crop than the former. About this time, a good deal of rain fell : which occasioned me no small share of trouble in drying the grass, and turning the little cocks. I then first remarked, that shoots were made from almost every joint, in consequence of the moisture : but, from some more than others : and of these many were of a finger's length. Had I not suffered this grass to stand, that I might save the seed, I am satisfied, I could have mowed it thrice in the year : but wanting to collect as great a quantity, as I could, of the seed, I have not yet actually tried
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that experiment. I am very confident, however, that this kind of grass may be brought to afford *eight tons of hay per acre*, in the year: and any person who may entertain doubts of the reasonableness of this supposition, may have them cleared up by ocular proof, if they will take the trouble to call on me; as great numbers of gentlemen have already done, to their intestine satisfaction in this point. The latter end of May, and the beginning of June, will be a proper time for such inspection; as this grass, being a forward kind, will be fit to cut at that season.

This grass has a peculiar quality, different from what is found in any other kind I ever knew before; which is, that it has very short joints, and that every joint sends out shoots, which strike root whenever they touch the ground. On taking a full grown plant of the grass out of the ground, it will be found, moreover, capable of being divided into twenty smaller roots or offsets, proper to be again planted: and these offsets, though taken thus from the root, even in the beginning of July, will bear feed the same year. If, likewise, when this grass is ready to be mowed, there should happen to be much rain, no damage will ensue on waiting a month for fair weather. Because, as this grass is constantly sending out shoots at every joint, it always keeps fresh: and does not wither, nor rot at the bottom, as other grasses do: but, on the contrary, it continues green, even till the seed be ripe: which is certainly a very singular property, and of great consequence.

The goodness of this kind of grass, may also be very obviously inferred from the following particular. When I first sowed it, which was in the month of April 1764, I had, as I have above declared, only one ounce and a half of the seed: but betwixt that time and the present, I have found such a surprising increase, that I have collected from the successive products of this ounce and half, as much seed as has sown two hundred and fifty acres of land: and have besides, as much by me, at present, as will sow one hundred acres more.

I shall not now dwell any longer, on the commendation of this grass, than only to say, that it has every quality requisite to make good hay. That it is easily propagated, and from a very small proportion of seed. That it is not subject to rot, or fail in patches, as most other kinds of grass do.

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That it is a beautiful green at all times, and consequently affords a most pleasing verdure, when sown in sight of any house, or made part of any prospect. And lastly, that the produce of hay from it is extremely great: being much more than any other kind of true grass will yield. Of the truth of all this, many persons can witness, who have, on seeing the real trials respecting it, given the greatest encomiums on it. I shall, therefore, proceed now to offer some directions for its culture.

The ground, on which the seed of this kind of grass is intended to be sown, is to be prepared in the manner that would be proper for lucern: that is to say, it should be well ploughed and harrowed; and cleared as much as possible from all weeds, in the same way as is done for barley. When the ground is well mellowed and sweetened, the seed may be sown: the quantity of which may be about one pound and a half per acre; and the time of doing it, from March to April.

Before the BIRD-GRASS seed be sown, it is proper to sow as much barley, or oats, as will afford half a crop: and such barley or oats being harrowed in, the pound and half of BIRD-GRASS seed must be sown over it: after which, in general cases, the ground is only to be rolled the first opportunity, when it is dry. But if the soil be sandy or dry, it may be proper to give it a very light harrowing.

This kind of grass cannot be well sown without some corn. Because it is of so fine and delicate a nature, at its first coming up, that the weeds would overpower and choke it, at that time: or a great expence would be necessary for cleaning them away by the hand. But, when this grass is so mature, as to be in the state of a pasture, or fit to cut, it grows so close and thick; that if a handful of money was thrown up over it, none would, when fallen, reach the ground.

As to the nature of the soil, proper for the culture of BIRD-GRASS, almost every kind will do very well for it; except, as has been observed before, such as is too wet or moory; and this is one of the good properties of this grass. Because few kinds flourish much on dry gravelly ground.

This is a just account of the observations and experiments, I have hitherto made on this valuable grass; and they seem sufficient to justify me, in endeavouring to render it known to the public, as an object worthy their attention.



